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FM AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9727

INFO RUEHAAH/AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT PRIORITY 2544

RUEHTA/AMEMBASSY ASTANA PRIORITY 0189

RUEHEK/AMEMBASSY BISHKEK PRIORITY 4235

RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO PRIORITY 1342

RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA PRIORITY 2109

RUEHDBU/AMEMBASSY DUSHANBE PRIORITY

RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL PRIORITY 7172

RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU PRIORITY 8411

RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 5771

RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 1109

RUEHNT/AMEMBASSY TASHKENT PRIORITY 3278

RUEHTA/AMEMBASSY ALMATY PRIORITY 9896

RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI PRIORITY 3280

RUEHKP/AMCONSUL KARACHI PRIORITY 6339

RUEHCI/AMCONSUL KOLKATA PRIORITY 0932

RUEHLH/AMCONSUL LAHORE PRIORITY 2554

RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI PRIORITY 3666

RUEHPW/AMCONSUL PESHAWAR PRIORITY 0912

RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO PRIORITY 2458

RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

RHMFIS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY

RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ISLAMABAD 002572

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PK](#)

SUBJECT: NEW POLL SHOWS WEAK SUPPORT FOR MUSHARRAF IN URBAN PUNJAB

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Peter Bodde, Reasons 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) On May 15-28, just days after political violence in Karachi left 40 people dead, the International Republican Institute (IRI) polled 1,500 Pakistanis in six cities throughout Punjab, Pakistan's most populous province. Polling questions, which had been developed weeks earlier with the help of the head of the ruling Pakistan Muslim League, Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain, included questions about elections, the popularity of individual politicians and political parties, and current political issues, such as the Chief Justice controversy.

¶2. (C) This is the first time that IRI has polled exclusively on these questions in only these six urban Punjab districts. While disaggregation of data for these areas from earlier provincial wide polls is in process, the absence of a one-to-one comparative baseline limits the utility of this poll for showing trends of support over time. Nevertheless, the polling results show weak support for President Musharraf. When asked whether President Musharraf should be re-elected, respondents in four of the six cities polled opposed it. The strongest opposition was in the industrial city of Gujranwala (71 percent) and the district capital of Lahore (64 percent). In Islamabad's sister city of Rawalpindi, 57 percent opposed Musharraf's re-election. In Faisalabad, Pakistan's third most populous city, 52 percent opposed it. Musharraf's strongest support was in the historic city of Multan, where 73 percent of respondents supported his re-election. The Siraiki city of Bahawalpur straddled the middle, with 49 percent of respondents supporting Musharraf's re-election and 48 percent opposed. Respondents from the same four cities who opposed Musharraf's re-election also opposed Musharraf's intention to stand for re-election before the current assemblies (Gujranwala, 71 percent; Lahore, 66 percent; Rawalpindi, 64 percent;

Faisalabad, 57 percent).

13. (C) When asked about President Musharraf's decision to suspend the Chief Justice, respondents in all six cities opposed it by a clear majority. Even Multan, which consistently supported President Musharraf and the ruling Pakistan Muslim League throughout the rest of the poll, opposed the Chief Justice's suspension by 70 percent. Opposition to the Chief Justice's suspension was highest in Rawalpindi (85 percent), followed by Bahawalpur (73 percent), Lahore and Multan (both 70 percent), Gujranwala (69 percent), and Faisalabad (62 percent).

14. (C) IRI has not yet presented the results to the Pakistan Muslim League (they plan to do so by Sunday). IRI Resident Country Director Robert Varsalone told PolOff that while he is still cross-checking the data, it appears that the weak support for Musharraf's ruling Pakistan Muslim League has not translated to an increased number of likely voters for other political parties. Rather, there are large number of respondents who selected "Don't know/No response" for which political party they would support in upcoming elections.

15. (C) Comment: The poll demonstrates that the Chief Justice issue, as expected, has resonance in urban Punjab where the population is comparatively well-informed, politically motivated, and directly affected on an almost weekly basis by bar association protests. While the poll contained no questions about the violence in Karachi that had occurred just a few days before pollsters went to the streets, anecdotal evidence from these urban centers strongly suggests

ISLAMABAD 00002572 002 OF 002

that it may have colored the populace's views on the Chief Justice controversy. It is important to note that urban Punjab is generally viewed as the center of opposition -- both Pakistan Muslim League - Nawaz and Pakistan People's Party -- support in the province. Even so, the strong anti-Musharraf sentiment reflected in these polling numbers seems to suggest that the Chief Justice controversy -- and the government's response to it -- has decreased Musharraf's support in these areas. Given the vast differences between urban and rural opinions in Punjab, polling in these urban areas can not/not be used to extrapolate support for Musharraf across the province. End Comment.

BODDE